Archaeological Investigations at the Sinclair Road-Rosillo Creek Project Bexar County, Texas

by

Thomas R. Hester and Harry J. Shafer

Submittted to

HNTB Corporation

by

ABASOLO ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS
San Antonio, Texas

Antiquities Permit No. 3868

Report No. 24
Abasolo Archaeological Consultants
San Antonio, Texas
2006

Abstract

In October 2005, an archaeological survey was carried out within the area slated for the construction of a realignment of Sinclair Road in southeastern Bexar County. The project, just over 10 acres in total, includes parcels on the east and the west sides of Rosillo Creek, immediately downstream from the present Sinclair Road bridge over the creek. The research design set forth by Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, and incorporated into Texas Antiquities Permit No. 3868 (Harry J. Shafer, Principal Investigator) had two major goals. First, a surface survey looked for evidence of prehistoric or historic utilization of the project area. Secondly, a metal detector survey was oriented toward possible materials from the 1813 Battle of Rosillo Creek. Crucial to both of these goals was backhoe testing to see if subsurface cultural deposits were present within the proposed right of way.

Surface observations recorded the presence of scattered chipped stone flakes and fragments of fire-cracked rock. Site 41BX1630 was defined on the basis of these materials. The metal detector survey found numerous metal artifacts, but all were modern in origin. Backhoe testing failed to expose any buried cultural remains. Based on these data, we recommend that no further archaeological work be done in the project area. The recorded site is not of sufficient importance to warrant State Archeological Landmark designation. No collections resulted from the field investigations.

Abstract

In October 2005, an archaeological survey was carried out within the area slated for the construction of a realignment of Sinclair Road in southeastern Bexar County. The project, just over 10 acres in total, includes parcels on the east and the west sides of Rosillo Creek, immediately downstream from the present Sinclair Road bridge over the creek. The research design set forth by Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, and incorporated into Texas Antiquities Permit No. 3868 (Harry J. Shafer, Principal Investigator) had two major goals. First, a surface survey looked for evidence of prehistoric or historic utilization of the project area. Secondly, a metal detector survey was oriented toward possible materials from the 1813 Battle of Rosillo Creek. Crucial to both of these goals was backhoe testing to see if subsurface cultural deposits were present within the proposed right of way.

Surface observations recorded the presence of scattered chipped stone flakes and fragments of fire-cracked rock. Site 41BX1630 was defined on the basis of these materials. The metal detector survey found numerous metal artifacts, but all were modern in origin. Backhoe testing failed to expose any buried cultural remains. Based on these data, we recommend that no further archaeological work be done in the project area. The recorded site is not of sufficient importance to warrant State Archeological Landmark designation. No collections resulted from the field investigations.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted Phase I archaeological investigations within the right of way at Sinclair Road/Rosillo Creek Realignment Project for HNTB and the City of San Antonio. Work performed in October 2005 included a 100% pedestrian survey, a metal detector survey, and backhoe testing. This research was carried out under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 3868 with Harry J. Shafer serving as Principal Investigator, and in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas." The goal of the fieldwork was to ensure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination as a State Archeological Landmark or to the National Register of Historic Places were damaged or destroyed due to the planned work. The survey was conducted within a project area of just over 10 acres, encompassing two areas on the east and west sides of Rosillo Creek (Fig. 1).

The Rosillo Creek drainage covers 28 square miles, flowing 14 miles within a narrow, 2-mile wide watershed from northeast Bexar County (near Windcrest) to its confluence with Salado Creek in the southeastern part of the county. The creek cuts through blackland prairie, marked by rolling to nearly level terrain. Sinclair Road crosses Rosillo Creek at "River Mile 5.40" below its headwaters. The floodplain at this locale, as well as most of the drainage, has been subjected to major flooding, notably in 1937, 1946, and 1968 (Corps of Engineers 1970; this does not include, of course, flooding episodes in the late 1990s and in 2002).

Research Design

The Sinclair Road realignment will cross Rosillo Creek in the southeastern section of San Antonio. Rosillo Creek is a historically sensitive area because of the Battle of Rosillo Creek which took place somewhere between Highway 87 and the creek's confluence with Salado Creek. A historical marker at W.W. White and Hildebrandt commemorates the battle, but does not mark the battlefield. Previous archaeological investigations near the mouth of Rosillo Creek failed to discover archaeological traces of the battle (Cox 1990). The battle was fought on March 29, 1813 between the Republican Army of the North led by José Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara and a Spanish royalist force under Texas governor Manuel Maria de Salcedo. This important battle resulted in the capture of San Antonio and led to the establishment of the first republic of Texas (Thonhoff 1996:686).

In order to assure that the project area did not impact the site of this important historic encounter, a metal detector survey was conducted along the right-of-way. Metal detector surveys have proven to be the best and most economical method of discovering and documenting historic battlefield sites (Cruse 2003; Collins and Molyneaux 2003).

In addition to the possible historic component within the project area, an initial inspection of the project area by Ms. Kay Hindes (2005; City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office) revealed a scatter of prehistoric chipped stone and burned rocks in the project area. The density and depth of the prehistoric material in the project area, however, could

not be determined by surface inspection alone. Therefore, subsurface investigations were carried out to assess the prehistoric site.

Backhoe testing was performed to examine for and assess any buried components at the site. This is the quickest and most efficient method of testing for subsurface archaeological deposits. Three backhoe trenches were excavated up to 90 cm (3 ft) in depth on the east side of Rosillo Creek (Fig. 4). The fill from each trench was troweled and examined for archaeological evidence (flakes, burned rocks, etc.). Profile sketches were made of one section of each trench and digital images were taken as further documentation.

Battle of Rosillo Creek

The most famous battle that took place in and around San Antonio was the 1836 siege of the Alamo, but other decisive battles were fought that helped frame the early political landscape of Texas. Among these battles were the battle of Rosillo Creek in March 29, 1813, the battle of Medina on August 17, 1813 which was the bloodiest of all, the Council House massacre of 1840, and the Dawson massacre of 1842.

The Battle of Rosillo took place about nine miles southeast of the old San Antonio. The battle unfolded thusly:

> "In August 1812, José Bernado Maximiliano Gutiérrez de Lara, a Mexican rebel, united with Lieutenant Augustus W. Magee and crossed the Sabine River with 130 men and captured Nacogdoches. Recruiting Mexican Indian and American supporters as they progressed, they occupied La Bahía (Goliad) on November 7, where Governor Manuel Maria de Salcedo placed them under siege. After the death of Magee, February 6, 1813, Samuel Kemper assumed command. After two defeats, the Spanish army retreated to San Antonio. The following month, Kemper, with the strength of about 800 men, marched toward the capital engaging the Royalists army of 1200 under command of General Simon de Herrera, and at what would later become known as the Battle of Rosillo, or Rosalis. San Antonio Surrendered unconditionally on April 1, and on April 3, 14 loyalists officers, including Governor Salcedo, General Herrera, and Nemesio de Salcedo y Salcedo were executed" (Cox 1990: 1).

No one knows precisely where the battle took place. Part of the confusion lies in the fact that the battle is also referred to as the Battle of Salado (Cox 1990: 3). The fight may have occurred near the confluence of Rosillo Creek and Salado Creek, between Rosillo and Salado creeks, or anywhere along Rosillo Creek from its mouth to several miles upstream.

Previous efforts to locate the site of the battle were conducted by I. Waynne Cox (1990) as part of a CRM survey the intersection of South W.W. White Road and Hildebrandt Road, south of the Sinclair Road project area. Cox conducted both a pedestrian and metal detector survey without positive results. He also inspected an area near the

confluence of Rosillo and Salado Creeks where he felt the battle most likely took place. Unfortunately, this area has not been severely disturbed by public and private land use operations (Cox 1990: 10).

Archaeological Background

The nature of historic and prehistoric cultural resources in southern Bexar County is poorly known (Shafer and Hester 2005a), especially when compared to intensive studies done across large parts of northern San Antonio. However, its archaeological record fits into the regional cultural framework extending back at least 11,200 years (e.g., Hester 2004). The first occupations occurred in the **Paleoindian** period during the last part of the Pleistocene, indicated by the occurrence of scattered Clovis and Folsom spearpoints. Groups were likely small and highly mobile. Clovis peoples (9200 B.C.) hunted Ice Age mammals, such as mammoth, and the later Folsom bands (8800 B.C.) emphasized large, extinct species of bison (buffalo). As modern environments began to emerge around 10,000 years ago, Paleoindian peoples were more numerous, and there is widespread evidence of occupation throughout the region. The hunting and gathering patterns of this early time frame, involving modern species of animals and plants, began to be intensified by 8,000 B.C., leading to the development of **Archaic** cultures. This way of life lasted for thousands of years, reflected by regional specialization and locally distinctive types of projectile points, scrapers, and other stone tools. It was not until about 500 A.D. that changes in this long-lived tradition began to change. The introduction of the bow and arrow marked the beginning of the **Late Prehistoric** period. For over 10,000 years, the ancient hunters had used the spear and spearthrower as their main weapon, and this began to be replaced by the bow and arrow around 2000 years ago. The most distinctive archaeological indicator is the presence of tiny arrow points, and later, around A.D. 1300, the intensified hunting of buffalo. With the arrival of the Spanish in the region in the late 17th century, the native peoples of the **Historic** period began to go into the missions. The raids of invading Lipan Apache bands spurred this transition.

In the area around the Sinclair-Rosillo project, there are no documented historic or prehistoric sites within 3000 meters. Upstream, there are widely scattered sites representing historic structures (19th and early 20th centuries) and prehistoric sites largely marked by lithic scatters (see Shafer and Hester 2005b). Sites downstream are within the Salado Creek drainage (e.g., 41BX358, 359, 705 – all lithic scatters with some fire-cracked rock).

To the southwest, also in the Salado Creek drainage, is site *41BX596*, recorded by a 1983 survey related to the San Antonio 201 Wastewater Treatment Project of the late 1970s (Fox 1977). What little cultural material was found indicate that this site, too, is a lithic procurement/"lithic scatter" area. The most significant site is nearby, on the east bank of Salado Creek. 41BX176 is a probable prehistoric cemetery site recorded in 1972 by Anne A. Fox. Commercial earth-mining exposed at least three burials and two Scallorn arrow points. No scientific excavation was carried out. Based on these meager data, 41BX176 may well fit into the pattern of burials and burial sites of the early part of the

Late Prehistoric (Austin Phase; ca. A.D. 700-1100) found in central and south Texas (Hester 2004).

In sum, most sites found in this part of Bexar County have few diagnostic or time-sensitive artifacts and can rarely be dated to any of the periods outlined above. This no doubt reflects the lack of archaeological surveys in the area, although some site surfaces may have been altered by artifact-collecting over the decades. It would be important to learn if the present "pattern" is simply the result of site function – lithic procurement, short terms camps and hunting/gathering activities that left few artifacts.

Survey Results

Surface Survey

The west portion of the project area (Fig.2), between Sinclair Road and Rosillo Creek, is relatively flat and heavily vegetated. However, it was partially disturbed when the original Sinclair Road was built and has been used extensively in recent decades for the dumping of construction debris and fill. Any cultural remains that might have once been in this area have been eliminated.

The larger, east portion of the project is heavily vegetated along the Rosillo Creek bank and floodplain. The terrain in this area gradually slopes upward from about 581 feet in elevation near Rosillo Creek to about 600-610 feet near present-day Sinclair Road (Fig. 3). Houston Black clay soils (0 to 3 percent slope) dominate the soils within the site area on the east side of Rosillo Creek. Houston Black clay (3 to 5 percent slope) occur on the west side of Rosillo Creek. Trinity-Frio soils are present in the floodplain (Taylor et al. 1991). Erosion is major problem in the Houston Black soils in the study area. There are several exposures of Uvalde Gravels on the higher parts of the eastern portion. Vegetation includes a number of large mesquite trees, smaller mesquite shrubs and other thorny underbrush, an abundance of whitebrush, prickly pear, Runyon's Escobaria cactus (cf. Everitt and Drawe 1992:33), and various natural and introduced grasses.

Due to extensive cattle-grazing and erosion (2005 was one of the driest years on record for Bexar County), surface visibility was good, averaging around 75%. Scattered on the surface were occasional chert (flint) flakes and widely dispersed fragments of fire-cracked rock (limestone, quartzite, chert). Beyond the project area, the prehistoric cultural material became more concentrated to the north, across Sinclair Road No formal tools were found and no concentrations of cultural debris (e.g., fire-cracked rock representing a cooking feature) could be distinguished. However, the occurrence of archaeological materials has led us to record this locale as site 41BX1630 (Figs. 8, 9). Furthermore, the surface artifacts indicated the need for backhoe trenching to see if subsurface buried deposits were present. Backhoe trenching was judged to be far superior, in the case of this site, to the use of shovel testing. Given the dry, hard soils – which were hard to deal with even in locating metal detector hits (see below)-- we were certain that backhoe trenches along the central east-west axis of the site (also the centerline of the project) would provide a much better view of potential buried remains.

The overall site dimensions are hard to delineate and our estimate is based on the areal extent of flakes and fire-cracked rock (see Fig. 9). It is over 100 meters north-south, extending north of Sinclair Road for an unknown distance and to the south toward a stock tank in the southwest corner of the tract. Beginning on the east floodplain of Rosillo Creek (narrow, and heavily vegetated), the site extends approximately 300 meters to the east, up the slope and onto a relatively flat area between about 590-610 feet in elevation.

It is possible that there was some short-term Historic Anglo-European occupation within the site area. In a May 5, 2005 visit to the project area, Kay Hindes (2005) reports whiteware sherds and purple-tinted glass dating to ca. 1900.

Metal Detector Survey

A metal detector survey was focused on the area to be disturbed by the realignment of Sinclair Road on the east side of Rosillo Creek. Using a Discovery 3300 metal detector, we concentrated on eastern and central parts of the project centerline (Fig 1). The metal detector dial registered "hits" whose intensity reflected the general type of metal buried within a few inches of the surface. There were numerous "hits"—mostly bits of iron or metal (these were at the low end of the scale, registering 01-02). Because of the widespread debris of recent historic origin across the east portion of the proposed realignment (e.g., near Sinclair Road -- cans and other metal trash, we did not have the time to check every "low level" hit that registered 01 to 02 on the metal detector, as these were always bits of rust, or some other very minor, modern trash (cf. Shafer and Hester 2005c). In an area along the centerline, we swept an area about 100 meters in length, and attempted to locate and identify each indication of buried metal. The results are provided in Table 1, along with the UTM coordinates; plottings of the items are also seen in Fig. 1.

Item #	Item Description	UTM location
1	*low metal reading; rust chips?; not found*	59719/50847
2	wire, small; short piece	59722/50849
3	small flattened can, cf. bean dip/fruit cup	59723/50850
4	01-02 hit; metal (rust?): not found	59729/50857
5	pull-tab from beer or soda can	59726/50864
6.	01-02 hit; not found	59734/50858
7.	heavily rusted "tomato juice" can	59762/50866

8.	rusted can at 8 inches	59774/50881
9.	a hit suggesting a "can" but not found (rather, a burrito wrapper at 3 inches)	59784/50882
10.	screw-on type bottle cap at 2 inches deep	59791/50871
11.	crumpled fragment of aluminum foil	59716/50855
12.	wire, small, short piece (see #2 above) at depth of 1-2 inches.	59713/50832

Table 1. Inventory of Items in Metal Detector Survey.

The metal detector survey failed to locate any iron or other metal objects that might be of the time frame for the Battle of Rosillo Creek. Indeed, all identified materials are from the past decade.

Backhoe Testing

Three backhoe trenches were excavated during the field investigations. Each is described below and their locations are plotted in Fig. 4.

Backhoe Trench 1 was dug near the highest point on the east side of the right-of-way on the east side of Rosillo Creek (Fig. 5). The locale was a shallow north-south depression, between Sinclair Road and a small stock tank. The trench was 2 meters (78.75 inches) in length and extended to a depth of 90 cm (36 inches) below the surface. Aside from modern trash in the upper 10 cm, no cultural materials were observed. In Zone 1 (0-70 cm), there were occasional chert pebbles ("Uvalde gravels") within the Houston Black Clay matrix. In the south half of Zone 1, laminae or lenses of tan sandy soil were observed. These may represent erosion ("silt") or ponding during flooding of the depression. At 70 cm, Zone 2 begins with the appearance of limonite streaks, with a lighter brown clay extending to the bottom of the trench. Backhoe Trench 1 was located at UTM coordinates 0559754/3250860 (all readings are in Zone 14, shown here as Easting/Northing).

Backhoe Trench 2 was placed at about the center of the project area east of Rosillo Creek (Fig. 6). This is also the approximate "center" of site 41BX1630, with scattered flakes and fire-cracked rock fragments scattered nearby. The area is well-drained and given the dry conditions of 2005, the soils were very hard. The trench was 2 meters in length and went to a depth of 60 cm (23.5 inches). Zone 1 was a dark brown-gray clay loam, very blocky in texture. A single interior flake came from the top 5-10 cm of the trench and was the only indication of cultural activity. Zone 2 was very similar to Zone 1, but

transitioned to heavily concentrated calcium carbonates at 60 cm. The UTM coordinates for Backhoe Trench 2 are 0559726/3250844.

Backhoe Trench 3 was placed about midway on the slope between the crest (Backhoe Trench 2) and Rosillo Creek to the west (Fig. 7). The trench was 2 meters (78.75 inches) long and was dug to a depth of 80 cm.(31.5 inches). From 0-30 cm, Zone 1 appears to be typical Houston Black Clay. Zone 2 (30-50 cm) is characterized by the calcium carbonate mottling seen in Backhoe Trench 2. Zone 3 began with dense pebble gravels at 50 cm, changing to cobble-sized gravels at 80 cm. There was no evidence of cultural materials. The UTM coordinates for Backhoe Trench 3 are 0559695/3250831.

Summary and Conclusions

An archaeological survey was carried out in October 2005 for the Sinclair Road Realignment Project at Rosillo Creek, southeastern Bexar County. The project area encompassed 10 acres on both sides of the creek (Fig. 8). The smaller part of the project is on the west side of Rosillo Creek. This area has been wholly disturbed by the earlier construction of Sinclair Road and the subsequent use of the area to discard construction fill.

However, on the east side of the creek, the project area crosses pasture land that holds the potential for prehistoric cultural resources, and given its location, evidence of the Battle of Rosillo Creek. The entire (100%) eastern portion was surveyed, revealing some areas of scattered chert (flint) flakes and fire-cracked rocks. Since these materials were eroded onto the surface and had no time-diagnostic or research value (and often mixed with recent trash; Fig. 9), they were not collected for curation. However, the presence of these remains led to the recording of site 41BX1630 (Fig. 8). Since the eastern portion was relatively undisturbed, a metal detector survey was carried out. This was complicated by the large amount of modern trash discarded along Sinclair Road, much of which had drifted downslope for a considerable distance. However, a systematic survey of 100 meters (east-west) within the project center line area, produced a number of identifiable metal objects. All were modern and there was no evidence of artifacts related to the Battle of Rosillo Creek.

Although the surface evidence at site 41BX1630 was widely scattered, our research design called for the placement of backhoe trenches along the project centerline. Three trenches were dug to check for possible buried cultural deposits. None were found.

Based on the results of this survey, it is our opinion that no further archaeological work is warranted. Site 41BX1630 is essentially a deflated surface manifestation, with no future research value. It is not eligible for nomination either as a State Archeological Landmark or to the National Register of Historic Places.

References Cited

Collins, J. M. and B. L. Molyneaux
2003 *Archaeological Survey.* Archaeologist's Toolkit 2, Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, California.

Corps of Engineers, U.S.Army
1970 *Flood Plain Information, Rosillo Creek, Bexar County, Texas.* Prepared for the San Antonio River Authority. U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Worth, Texas District.

Cox, I. W.
1990 *Field Survey and Archival Research for the Rosillo Creek Battleground Area, Southeast San Antonio, Texas* Archaeological Survey Report 177. Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio.

Cruse, B.
2003 Detecting Historic Indian Sites—The Case for Metal Detecting as an Archeological Strategy. *Bulletin of the Texas Archeological Society* 74: 103-130.

Everitt, J. H. and D. L. Drawe
1991 *Trees, Shrubs, and Cacti of South Texas.* Texas Tech University Press, Lubbock.

Fox, Anne A.
1977 *Archaeological Assessment of the San Antonio 201 Wastewater Treatment Project.* Archaeological Survey Report 41. Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio.

Hester, T. R.
2004 The Prehistory of South Texas. In *The Prehistory of Texas*, ed. By T. K. Perttula, pp. 127-151. Texas A&M University Press, College Station.

Hindes, K.
2005 Site Visit to Rosillo Creek/Sinclair Road Project Area. Notes on file, City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office.

Shafer, H. J. and T. R. Hester
2005a *An Archaeological Survey of the Southton Road Development Property, Bexar County, Texas.* Report 7. Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, San Antonio.

2005b *Archaeological Survey of the New Sulphur Springs Road Tract, Bexar County, Texas.* Report 16. Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, San Antonio.

2005c *Archaeological Survey of the Remuda Ranch Offsite Sanitary Sewer Main.* Report 12. Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, San Antonio.

Taylor, F. B., R. B. Hailey, and D. L. Richmond
1991 *Soil Survey of Bexar County.* United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Series 1962, No.12. Washington, D.C.

Thonhoff, R. H.
1996 Rosillo, Battle of. *The New Handbook of Texas,* Vol. 5:686. Texas State Historical Association, Austin.

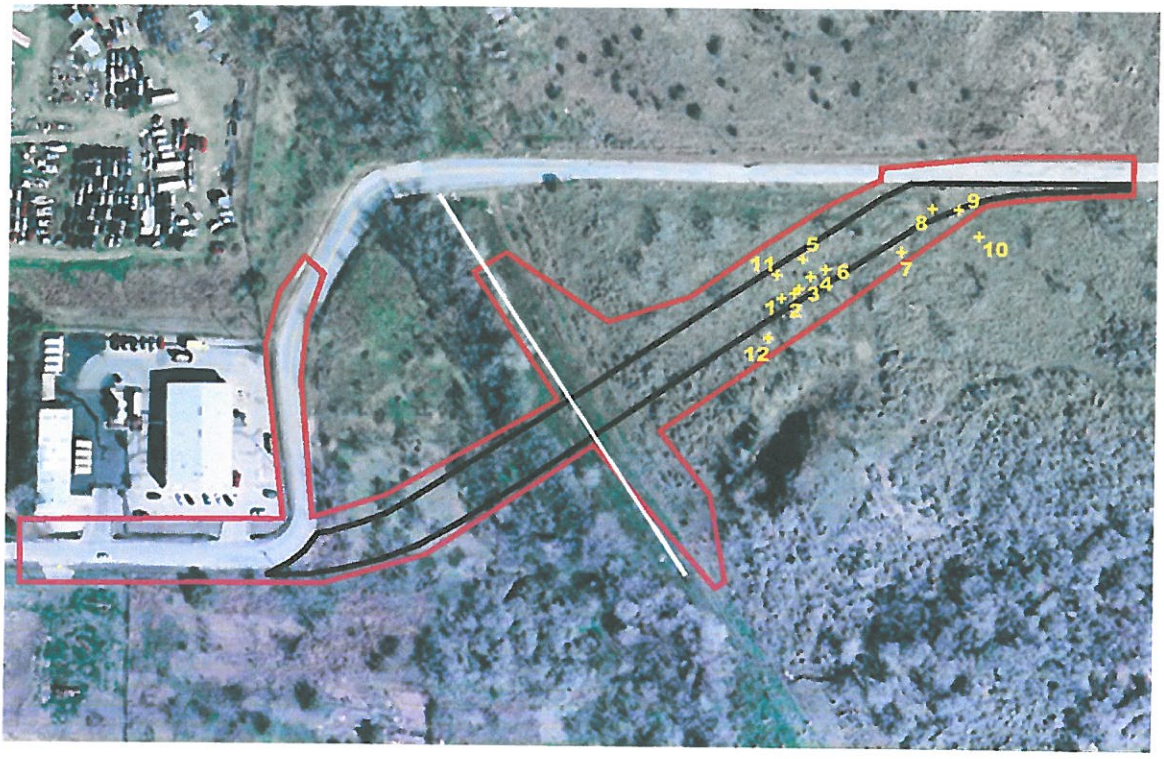

Figure 1. Project Area With Recorded Metal Detector Finds. The project area is outlined in red, and the right-of-way in black. Provenienced metal detector finds are shown in yellow.

Figure 2. View of West Portion of the Project Area. Looking east toward Rosillo Creek.

Figure 3. East Portion of Project Area. Sinclair Road is in the background. The view is to the north at an elevation of 590-600 feet.

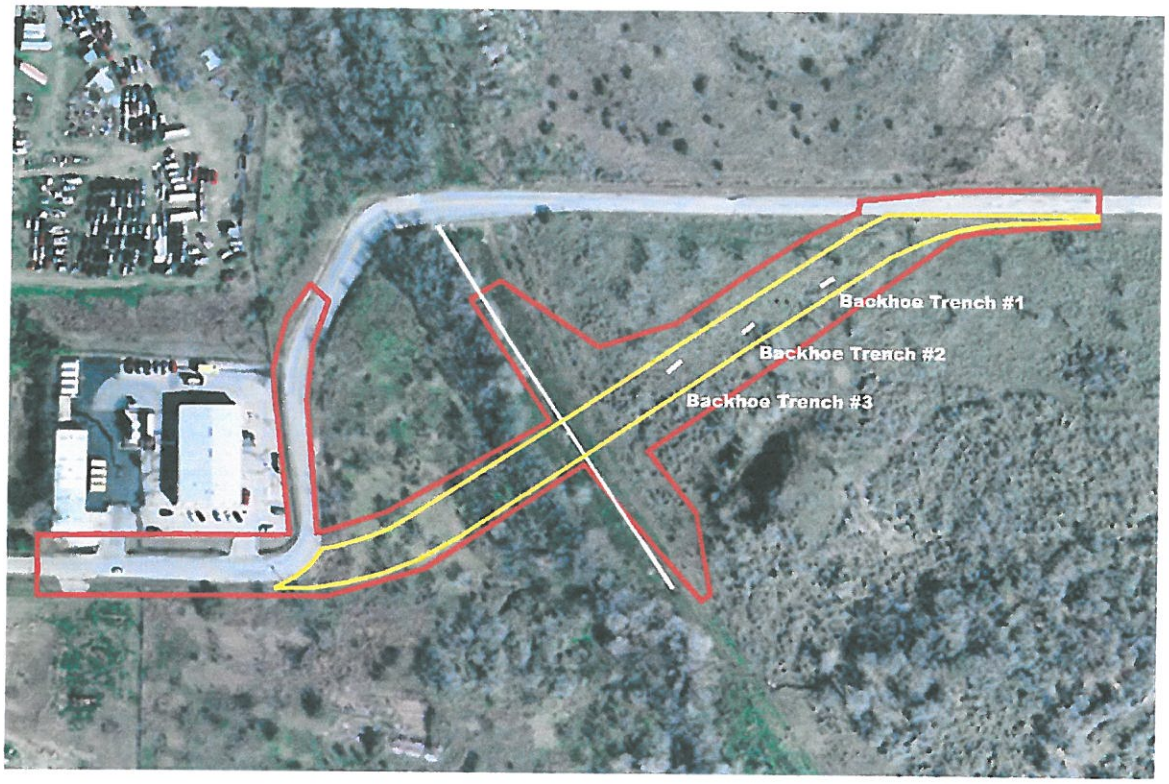

Figure 4. View of Project Area and Placement of Backhoe Trenches. Project area is outlined in red and the right-of-way in yellow. The white bar oriented northwest-southeast is a 30-inch pipeline paralleling Rosillo Creek (east side).

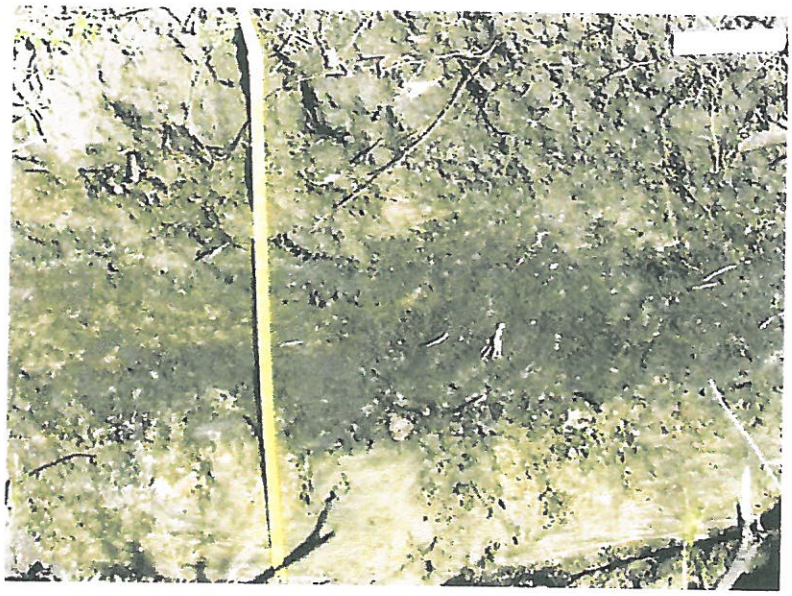

Figure 5. Backhoe Trench 1. North profile is shown. Scale in the upper right is 15 mm; tape is extended at 90 mm. Note the color change between Zone I and Zone II. Laminae are in the center left.

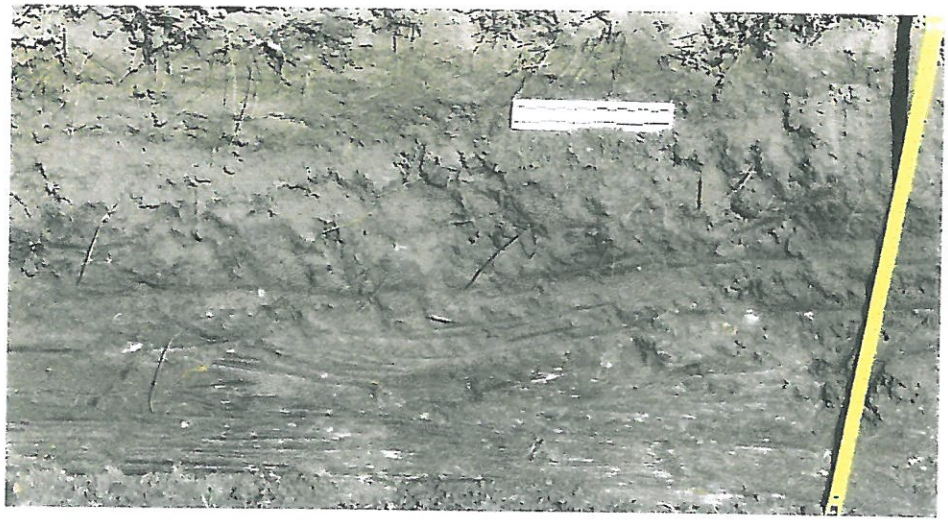

Figure 6. Backhoe Trench 2. North profile. Horizontal scale is 15 mm long; tape at right extended to 58 mm. Note calcium carbonate streaks in Zone II.

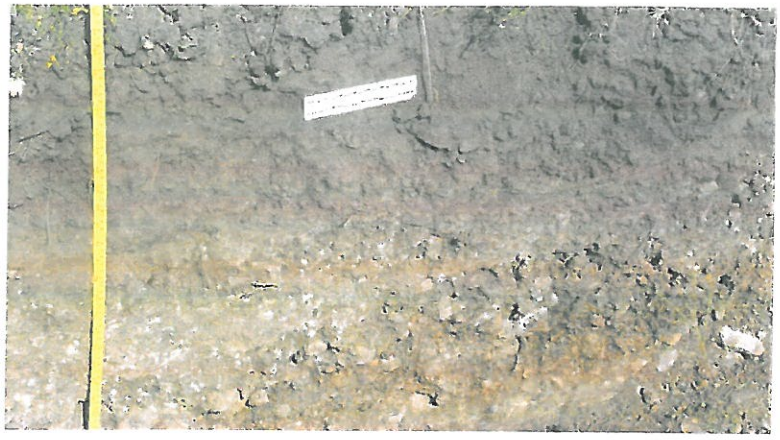

Figure 7. Backhoe Trench 3. North profile. White scale is 15 mm long. Tape on left is extended between 78 mm (top) and 15 mm (bottom). Zones I, II, and III are shown; note the dense gravels in Zone III.

IMAGE RESTRICTED

0 0.09 0.18 0.27 0.36 0.45 mi

Figure 8. Section from USGS San Antonio East, Showing the Location of Site 41BX1630.

Figure 9. View of Eroded Surface at Site 41BX1630. This typical scatter includes fire-cracked rocks, occasional flakes, and recent debris. The scale is 6 inches long.